

**STATEMENT OF CHAIRWOMAN LAURA RICHARDSON as prepared  
Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and  
Response  
Committee on Homeland Security**

**“Caring for Special Needs during Disasters: What’s being done for Vulnerable Populations?”**

**June 15, 2010 at 10:00 AM  
311 Cannon House Office Building**

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As we approach the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina and move into hurricane season, we must heed the lessons of past failures and look to engage in integrated preparedness planning that meets the needs of all our citizens, including: the mentally and physically impaired; the poor; the elderly; children; individuals with limited English proficiency; and culturally diverse communities, to name a few.

When it comes to disaster planning, our most vulnerable populations should no longer be left as a secondary consideration or an annex to an Emergency Operations Plan.

This hearing provides an opportunity to hear what steps have been taken by FEMA and others to ensure we keep moving forward.

The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 included many reforms to provide FEMA with the necessary tools and leadership to ensure integration of disability related issues.

For example, the Act directed the FEMA Administrator to appoint a Disability Coordinator to ensure that the needs of individuals with disabilities are being properly addressed in emergency preparedness and disaster relief.

I was pleased that Ms. Roth was selected to lead the Office of Disability Integration and Coordination. Your extensive background in disability policy and first-hand Katrina response experience makes you the right individual to serve in this vital role.

But it is unclear to the Committee whether your office has been provided the funding necessary to fulfill its mission.

We can not allow these reforms to be considered window dressing; rather they must be real and able to ensure that people with disabilities have an empowered advocate with the right tools.

Additionally, the Act requires that FEMA “coordinate” many of its efforts with the National Council on Disability (NCD).

In August 2009, NCD released a report which provided several recommendations for making improvements to further integration efforts.

Dr. Young serves as the Chairman of NCD and we would like to hear what steps FEMA has taken to coordinate with the Council and implement the report’s recommendations.

Also, the Post-Katrina Act required that FEMA provide guidance to States and localities on how to implement disability integration into emergency planning.

We would like to learn the status of the guidance documents for states and localities; and NCD's role in developing them.

Our other two panelists will discuss the collaborative work of FEMA and the U.S. Army in preparing communities surrounding the Army's chemical warfare agent stockpiles.

Our second panel will continue to discuss the unique needs of children, culturally diverse communities, and citizens who are economically disadvantaged.

I understand Dr. Robles, Superintendent of the Los Angeles County Office of Education, could not be here today, but I would like to extend a warm welcome to her deputy, Mr. Jon Gundry, who will discuss how LA's school emergency plans are developed to meet the unique challenges of preparing children for disasters.

I have introduced HR 4898, The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Preparedness Planning Act, to address the challenges associated with preparing our school children for disasters.

I would like to thank all the Members of this Committee who have co-sponsored this legislation.

Specifically, my bill would fill a critical need by establishing a competitive grant program for emergency preparedness planning at local school districts.

Ms. Rothe-Smith of National VOAD will discuss the experiences of non-profit and faith-based organizations in providing an all-community approach to disaster response and recovery.

Preparedness planning for all citizens continues to evolve, but it is clear that more has to be done to fully integrate our plans to include the needs of all persons.

I look forward to hearing how our Federal agencies are ensuring this occurs and about the unique approaches and experiences of our local and non-profit partners.